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ABSTRACT

A research guide on student access to the Arizona University System, with studies of retention and persistence, is presented as one working paper in the final report of the Arizona Board of Regents' Task Force on Excellence, Efficiency and Competitiveness. Six topics of discussion, covering areas to be investigated, are as follows: academic preparation (persistence and minority status); familial/peer influence; university community influence; demographic (urban and rural); the future (Hispanic students, Native American students, and Black students); and social factors (economic and cultural). Five methodologies recommended to accomplish these tasks are: (1) selected groups of professional and lay people will meet with Task Force staff members to gather information, comments, and suggestions impinging directly on the areas of concern; (2) literature will be searched to obviate redundancy and unnecessary effort; (3) all data collected will be subjected to statistical analysis; (4) once a body of information is assembled, consultation will be sought with professional personnel, both teaching and staff, as well as nationally known experts in the field; and (5) throughout the above steps, appropriate staff colleagues will be consulted to critically evaluate process, procedures, and results. (SM)

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STUDENT ACCESS TO THE ARIZONA UNIVERSITY SYSTEM WITH STUDIES OF RETENTION & PERSISTENCE: A RESEARCH GUIDE

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In responding to the question of whether Arizona is providing university access to all students, who can appropriately benefit from a university experience, the areas of necessary investigation are basically four, but with the addition of a critical review of the future availability of higher education for the two dominant minority cultures.

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Pre-college preparation of the student is obviously a fundamental factor for academic success. The quality of pre-secondary and secondary school learning experience needs to be examined from several aspects including ethnic distribution, urban versus rural environment, academic programming and advisement.

PERSISTENCE

Once a student makes the decision to seek post secondary education and matriculates in either the community

college or in the university system, academic persistence and progress to graduation must be reviewed and evaluated in terms of learning assistance, financial aid, and general student support services.

MINORITY STATUS

Although Hispanic students dominate the minority student population, the number of Native American students in many urban and rural schools is comparable or exceeds that of Hispanic students. Obviously on the reservations, Native Americans comprise the overwhelming majority. Black students constitute a tertiary component and are a comparative minority to the other two groups, except in certain districts within the urban areas. Thus, an analysis of the distribution of minority students needs to be made on a district by district basis and within some districts, school by school. A fourth minority needs mention, namely the Asian/Pacific Islander. Because Pacific Islanders are a comparatively minor group and because the academic success of Asian students generally exceeds that of the white majority, an in-depth study of this group is

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ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS

FAMILIAL/PEER INFLUENCE

In many instances, the pressures of home environments and peer groups is overwhelming to the extent that without adequate and timely secondary school and campus support services, the student never attains even the hopeful expectation stage in the formulation of educational goals. Very little research has been published about the extent of parental influence on the decision-making aspect of a student's life. In Hispanic and Native American families, a student's parents or some older family member will often exert great influence during the early stages of adult hood. For this reason, it is very desirable that documentation be obtained to support or refute this widely held view.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY INFLUENCE

The need to ascertain the nature and extent of the factors in the university community which either positively or negatively influence a student to succeed academically in the new "home" setting needs to be studied. The determination of the support services necessary to reinforce or counteract these factors could be the most important contributor to the academic performance and ultimate educational attainment of the minority student.

DEMOGRAPHIC

URBAN

The student who grows up within the urban environment is exposed to a variety of life experiences virtually unknown to the rural student. Some aspects of this environment are obviously very positive

while others are profoundly negative. The extent to which high population density, either in schools or in general living conditions is an influential parameter in a student's decision to attend college and later to successfully complete a degree program has not been explored in-depth, especially in comparison to the rural student. In order to develop programs designed to address factors resulting from population environments, survey data must be collected, analyzed and recommendations made.

RURAL

A group of students, generally not considered as constituting a minority, are rural students who in comparison to students in the large metropolitan areas often do not have the educational advantages which an urban setting affords. An assessment of educational opportunities available to the rural student in comparison to those of the urban student will be made.

THE FUTURE

Finally, forecasting studies need to be made if any credence is to be given to demographic projections of population trends in Arizona. All available data indicates a doubling or tripling of the Hispanic population within the next two to three decades. Certainly within the next ten years, the numbers of Hispanic students in the high schools of the State will likely double. With the current scholastic attainment and the high drop-out rate, the number of these students who will not be able to meet entrance requirements will constitute a highly significant percentage of the total Hispanic student population. Similarly, the same condition exists for the Native American student

not recommended.

HISPANIC STUDENTS

Hispanic students comprise the most significant majority since demographic projections indicate that the student population will at least double within the next two decades. Concurrently, however, the drop-out rate of Hispanic students at the secondary level is about 28%. Extensive study is needed to ascertain reasons for this high drop-out rate of students both at the secondary and college level. In addition, the influence of environmental factors such as parental and family support, language and cultural barriers, and peer group pressures need to be examined.

NATIVE AMERICAN STUDENTS

Both off and on the reservations, Native American students are the most deprived minority group, educationally, and have the least opportunity for attaining higher education of any of the minority groups. As in the Hispanic group, low language proficiency is a formidable barrier to academic success. Standardized achievement test scores for reservation schools are consistently the lowest in the State. Detailed analysis of the factors contributing to this condition need to be made with definitive recommendations for improvement presented.

BLACK STUDENTS

Although Black students are the smallest of the three minority groups, in urban districts and schools they may comprise a significant portion of the student population. Whether significant studies of access and persistence of black students in Arizona have been made is not

certain, but a comprehensive review should be made together with the studies of the dominant minorities.

SOCIAL

Secondary to academic preparation but perhaps of greater importance in academic achievement are factors critical to effective functioning within the majority culture. Although some of these factors are simple and self-evident, others are complex and difficult to define. Student support needs are varied but may be considered in two major divisions as indicated below.

ECONOMIC

In addition to the availability of financial aid, understanding of the process of obtaining financial assistance is not always obvious. The ability of parents to provide supplementary support and the potential absence of economic assistance to the low-income family by the student while attending college are possible factors limiting access and affecting persistence. The parameter of economic affordability for the minority student as well as displacement costs for the rural student need to be assessed as contributing factors.

CULTURAL

The influence of deep-seated mores and sociological patterns of life that characterize minority cultures constitute perhaps the most significant reason for both the lack of access and persistence among minority students and probably the non-minority rural students as well.

population. Although the number of Native American students is not as large as that of Hispanic students, the academic performance of this group is even lower. Unless extensive studies are made now and corrective action is taken, the economic and socio-political effect of this segment of society on the future of Arizona could be disastrous.

In order to accomplish the above tasks, a number of methodologies will be employed as a means of obtaining reliable data, analyzing the data using various statistics, presenting results graphically, and finally making written recommendations.

The following methodologies will be used:

- A. Selected groups of both professional and lay people will meet with appropriate members of the Task Force staff in order to obtain information, comments and suggestions which impinge directly on the concern being addressed.
- B. The literature will be searched in order to obviate redundancy and unnecessary effort.
- C. All data collected will be subjected to statistical analysis utilizing existing computer programs at the appropriate Arizona university. Similarly, university facilities will be utilized to prepare graphic presentations.
- D. Once a body of information is assembled, consultation will be sought with professional personnel, both teaching

and staff, as well as nationally known experts in the field for the purpose of evaluating potential conclusions and developing recommendations.

- E. Throughout the above steps, appropriate staff colleagues will be consulted to critically evaluate process, procedures, and results.